

Quarterly Report July 2021



SOS Office Releases New PVI Ads



Photo courtesy of ncs1.org

Legislative Agenda 2021

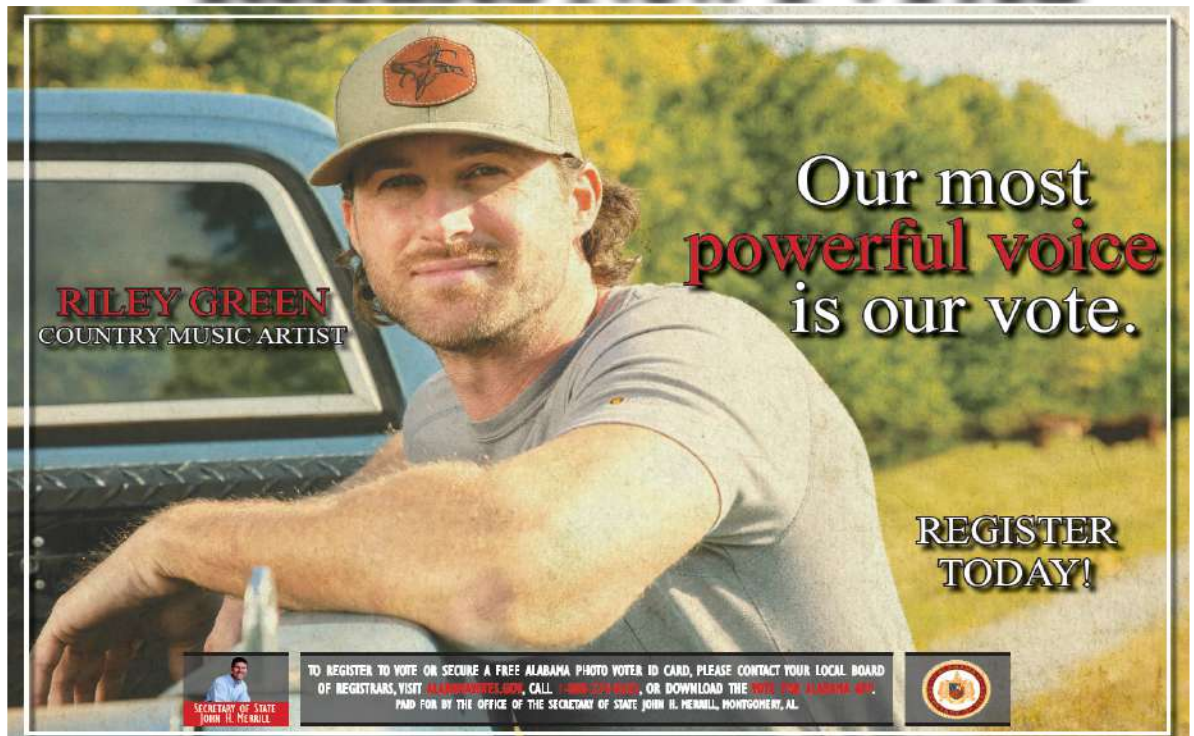


UCC Staff Member Named Honorable
Mention for Employee of the Year



Business Services Division Celebrates
Five Years of Same-Day Filings

Secretary of State's Office Releases New PVI Ad



LET YOUR
VOICE
BE HEARD
VOTE

The Alabama Secretary of State's Office teamed up with Country Music Artist Riley Green to help launch the newest set of posters and television advertisements for the office's photo voter identification and voter registration promotional efforts. A native of Jacksonville, Alabama, Mr. Green joins the list of other renowned Alabamians who have helped to spread awareness about the state's free voter ID provisions and encourage those who are eligible to register to vote. In previous years, the office produced materials featuring Alabama Head Football Coach Nick Saban and former Auburn Head Football Coach Gus Malzahn in 2015, Heavyweight Boxing Champion Deontay Wilder and former NBA Star Charles Barkley in 2016, Miss Alabama 2017 Jessica Procter and former NASA Astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison in 2017, American Idol Season Five winner Taylor Hicks and radio talk show stars Rick and Bubba in 2018, Country Music Artist Jamey Johnson and Alabama's first Governor William Wyatt Bibb (actor portrayal) in 2019, and the women of the Alabama Legislature and Alabama veterans Commander Lee Allen Hallman, Dr. Regina Benjamin, and Captain Gary Michael Rose in 2020. A second ad featuring another Alabamian will be released later in the year.

Click the image to watch our latest ad, which will appear throughout the state between commercial breaks for local programming.



Legislative Agenda 2021

This year's Legislative Session commenced on February 2, 2021 and came to a close on May 17, 2021. As in previous years, the Secretary of State's Office was instrumental in the introduction of a number of bills that would prove beneficial to the people of Alabama. Nine of the 20 bills passed and have been enacted, but the remaining 15 bills died and may be reintroduced in the future. The following list gives a brief description of each bill and its current status.

House Bill 538: Representative Alan Baker / Senator Garlan Gudger

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-364

This bill requires absentee ballot applications returned by mail to be received no later than seven days before the election. Applications returned by hand may still be received up until five days before the election. In addition, this bill allows for the opening of absentee ballots for tabulation to begin at 7:00 a.m. on Election Day.

House Bill 314: Representative Rod Scott / Senator Tom Butler

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-534

This bill allows the Secretary of State and Boards of Registrars to utilize the change-of-address information supplied by the United States Postal Service to update the voter rolls. This change will save the state almost one million dollars every four years through decreased printing and publication costs. This bill also increases the county reimbursement rate for publication costs from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$, providing financial assistance to the counties.

House Bill 285: Representative Wes Allen / Senator Dan Roberts

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-535

This bill prohibits the removal of any ballot or voting machine from the designated polling place, prohibiting the fraudulent practice of curbside voting and protecting the chain of ballot custody.

House Bill 167: Representative Chris Blackshear / Senator Clay Scofield

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-448

This bill prohibits a voter from voting more than once, either in Alabama or in Alabama and in another state.

House Bill 116: Representative David Standridge / Senator Billy Beasley

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-446

This bill allows the Secretary of State to conduct a one-time post-election audit in three counties following the November 8, 2022 General Election. The goal of the audit is to determine the accuracy of the originally reported election outcome and increase voter confidence.

House Bill 123: Representative David Faulkner / Senator Linda Coleman-Madison

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-335

This bill allows a registered voter who is a federal or state prosecutor, federal, state, probate, or municipal judge, law enforcement officer, legislator, or the spouse of the aforementioned to have his or her personally identifiable information omitted from voter lists, except for those lists provided to federal or state agencies. Upon successful application, everything (mailing or residential address, date of birth, race, gender, voting districts, etc.) but the name of the registered voter will be omitted from generally available lists of registered voters.

Senate Bill 31: Senator Dan Roberts / Representative Charlotte Meadows

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-164

This bill reduces the period for runoff elections to four weeks in all special and municipal elections in order to be consistent with all county, state, and federal elections.

Senate Bill 238: Senator Jim McClendon / Representative Steve Hurst

Status: Died in Second House

This bill would allow a voter who is blind or visually impaired to be electronically transmitted a ballot so that he or she may vote independently.

House Bill 154: Representative Andy Whitt / Senator Rodger Smitherman

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-314

This bill requires all principal campaign committees to file reports and statements electronically with the Secretary of State's Office, increasing transparency and consistency. This "one-stop shop" allows users to track reports in one centralized database.

House Bill 165: Representative Reed Ingram / Senator Garlan Gudger

Status: ENACTED – Assigned Act # 2021-222

This bill allows the Secretary of State to waive the \$25.00 certificate of existence fee during declared states of emergency to assist struggling businesses applying for federal or state aid.

House Bill 155: Representative Randy Wood

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill removes the two witness requirement for people voting pursuant to the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), allowing military members and their dependents to vote with fewer restrictions. Currently, Alabama is the only state in the country that requires two witnesses on UOCAVA ballots. Three states (Alaska, Virginia, and Wisconsin) require one signature.

House Bill 328: Representative Chris Sells

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill requires a person seeking office to file his or her principal campaign committee within five days of becoming a candidate. Failure to comply would result in not appearing on the ballot. Currently, there is no penalty for not filing within five days of becoming a candidate.

House Bill 575: Representative Mike Holmes

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill would prohibit poll watchers and candidates from providing voting assistance at the polls.

House Bill 357: Representative Corley Ellis

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill would require county probate judges and municipal clerks to publicly test voting machines prior to an election to ensure the precision and accuracy of the machines.

House Bill 117: Representative Mike Ball

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill changes the filing deadline for daily campaign finance reports, during the week before the election, from 12:01 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. to increase transparency in the filings process. Currently, almost 12 hours are left out of reports.

House Bill 315: Representative Bob Fincher / Senator Steve Livingston

Status: Died in Second House

This bill allows for the accumulation of registrar working days in the case of an absent registrar. Please note this bill would not change the amount of money allocated to a county.

Senate Bill 44: Senator Billy Beasley / Representative Chip Brown

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill allows the Secretary of State to provide digital copies of all bills, resolutions, and memorials electronically by order of either house of the legislature. Coinciding with Act 2019-414, which no longer requires the printing of acts and resolutions, this bill removes the requirement to bind state documents.

House Bill 378: Representative Kelvin Lawrence / Senator Malika Sanders-Fortier

Status: Died in Second House

This bill increases the amount of working days for registrars in Wilcox County from 120 days to 168 days, allowing them to complete the necessary work to process voter registration applications and prepare for elections.

House Bill 139: Representative Brett Easterbrook / Senator Bobby Singleton

Status: Died in Second House

This bill allows the Legislature to alter court costs in Choctaw County, allowing for the redistribution of funds used by the Sheriff's Office in order to self-fund. This bill would rely on the passage of a local amendment by the electors of Choctaw County.

House Bill 589: Representative Kerry Rich

Status: Died in House of Origin

This bill prohibits the pre-filling of any voter registration application or absentee ballot application. Violators of this law would be guilty of a Class C felony.



SOS Chief of Staff Celebrates 25 Years of Governmental Service



On April 1, 2021, the Secretary of State's Office honored Chief of Staff and Deputy Secretary of State David Anthony Zapata Brewer for his 25 years in government service.

A native of Alaska, Mr. Brewer earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1993 and Master of Public Information Degree in 1995 from The University of Alabama, where he was inducted into the Alpha Epsilon Lambda Graduate Students Honor Society. In previous years, he served as an intern for the Tuscaloosa City Council and the Baldwin County Commission in 1996 and was hired as a full-time employee in 1997. He also served as the Assistant to the County Administrator, was appointed to serve as the interim County Administrator in 2010, and became the official County Administrator from 2011 to 2014, serving a total of 19 years within Baldwin County's government.

Mr. Brewer joined the Secretary of State's Office on January 19, 2015 and has been an outstanding leader in his six years of servitude. Secretary Merrill awarded him the National Association of Secretaries of State's (NASS) Gold Medallion Award on April 30, 2018 for his exceptional dedication to the people of Alabama. During his anniversary celebration on April 1st, Mr. Brewer received an engraved plaque in the shape of Alabama to commemorate his 25 years to the state.

UCC Staff Member Named Honorable Mention for Employee of the Year



The Alabama State Personnel Department hosted an Employee of the Year competition to honor exemplary state employees for their service. As a result, Ms. Shirleen Moncrief of the Secretary of State's Office was selected as an Honorable Mention and was featured in a special edition of State Personnel's newsletter.

A five-year staff member of the SOS Uniform Commercial Code department, which equates to half of the Business Services Division, Ms. Moncrief stands as UCC's Assistant Supervisor. In the absence of the UCC Head Supervisor, Ms. Moncrief confidently and effectively takes charge of the department and oversees the staff's daily operations to ensure that all the needs of the people are met. She is also responsible for data entry, validating, scanning all of the UCC documents that come into the office, training other employees on various tasks, and answering incoming calls, amongst various other responsibilities, as assigned.

Not only does Ms. Moncrief exhibit excellent leadership and workmanship prowess, but she also possesses a positive nature and genuine interest in learning new skills. She always yearns for new opportunities to learn and improve her work ethic, and she stands as an excellent example to the rest of the Secretary of State staff.

Business Services Division Celebrates Five Years of Same-Day Filings



Beth Hall, Secretary Merrill, & Elaine Swearengin



Business Services Staff

June 18, 2021 marked the Secretary of State Business Services Division's five-year anniversary for same-day business filings.

In 1850, legislation authorized the Alabama Secretary of State to file and certify articles of incorporation for road construction companies, which resulted in the development of the Corporations Division. In the following years, steamship, railroad, banks, and insurance companies were required to file articles or charters of incorporation with the Secretary of State. Later, the Office of the Secretary of State became the depository for various entity records, and ultimately, there was a need for a Business Entity section. Today, the Business Entities sub-division, staffed by 11 employees, receives around 500 requests each day for information regarding its more than 250,000 filings. The department is supervised by Mrs. Elaine Swearengin.

Shortly after the development of the Business Entities section, the Uniform Commercial Code section was developed. The UCC sub-division operates a filing and retrieval center for UCC financing statements at the state level. If a secured party wishes to perfect a security interest in a collateral when the proper place to file is the Office of the Secretary of State, they must submit a UCC-1 form to the office with the appropriate fees. There are more than 500,000 documents on file within this sub-division, and approximately 300+ statements are received daily. The department is staffed by five employees and is supervised by Ms. Margaret "Beth" Hall.

Before Secretary Merrill took office on January 19, 2015, the Business Services Division was seven to nine months behind on processing incoming business filings. After a change of administration and several months of hard work, Business Entities and UCC were able to bring all of the filings up-to-date, and Mrs. Swearengin and Ms. Hall have ensured that the staff continues to follow this protocol in order to operate at top efficiency.

"As I look back to those days when we were so far behind in filing the Business Entity documents and how we have caught up to filing the same-day and no later than the next business day, all I can feel is complete amazement!" stated Business Entities Supervisor Elaine Swearengin. "I am so thankful for and extremely proud of my entire staff of the Business Entities Division. Bringing the filings of all Business Entity records up-to-date is due to the hard work and dedication of every one of my staff members in the Business Entity Division. When one shines, we ALL SHINE! I wish to thank Secretary Merrill for his encouragement and his belief in us to get this job done."

"It has been an honor to work with Secretary Merrill and the team he constructed for the last five years," stated UCC supervisor Beth Hall. "Without the leadership of his team, we wouldn't be where we are today. In the UCC Division, we adjusted our workflow in order to achieve same-day business filings. We actually welcomed these changes because it made our jobs a little easier. In the UCC Division, we handle anywhere from 50 filings to over 3,000 filings in one day. Only five people work in the UCC Division and have accomplished same-day business filings regardless of how many filings we received. That can be very challenging, especially with the rise of Covid-19, but we still achieved this goal. The employees in the UCC Division are very dedicated to seeing the job through to the end. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to each staff member in our division."

"I am so proud of what our Business Services Division has been able to accomplish within the last 260 weeks," stated Secretary Merrill. "Elaine, Beth, and the Business Entities and UCC staff have done a tremendous job in ensuring that all incoming business filings are processed within the same-day and no later than the next business day. As a result, hundreds of businesses across the state are able to function more effectively and no longer have to worry about filing delays."

The Business Entities and UCC sub-divisions are open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and are located in the RSA Plaza on 770 Washington Avenue in Montgomery, Suite 580. Business Entities can be reached at 334-242-5324, and UCC can be reached at 334-353-0203.

Quarterly Accomplishments

- As of **June 25, 2021**, **1,866,817** people have registered to vote since Secretary Merrill took office on **January 19, 2015**, which sets the total to a record-breaking **3,592,919** registered voters.
- As of **June 18, 2021**, the Business Services Division comprised of **Business Entities** and **Uniform Commercial Code (UCC)** have completed **260 consecutive weeks** (5 years) of **same-day business filings** completed no later than the next business day. (See page 6 for more info.)
- The Secretary of State's Office pursued the passing of **20 bills** in the **2021 Legislative Session**. **Nine** of the bills were passed and **enacted**. (See pages 2-4 for more info.)



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**Don't Miss Volume 7 Issue 3,
Coming October 2021!**